



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

title in his own preaching. Like Jesus again, he was declared of wonderful birth in Bethlehem, of Davidic lineage. Like Jesus, he was hailed by the people as a prophet, and stigmatized as devil-possessed by his enemies. Like Jesus, he died as a martyr to the truth he preached, and was believed to have risen from the dead. Like Jesus, he was the subject of the written word, chronicling his story and his message. His followers were disciples, taught in the way of the Lord, who believed and were baptized; they prayed their Master's prayer and sent abroad apostles to spread his teachings.

Here are rival Messiahs. To the Christians John becomes, in the literal sense of the word, an Antichrist, *ἀντίχριστος*, an imitation, pretended Christ, a parody of Messiah. The only New Testament writer who pens the word "antichrist" is the author of the Fourth Gospel, in the epistle in which he sets over against one who came "in water only" Jesus the Messiah "that came by water and blood."

This paper has been concerned only to recall attention to the *data* actually offered by the New Testament, and to raise the question whether the implication of these *data* does not favor the hypothesis of Baldensperger. As we look back at the years 29 and 30 of our era, through the medium of a Christian tradition, of course Jesus looms so large as quite to overshadow all others. Beside the light of the world, the rays of a candle, though it be "burning and shining," glimmer but feebly. This is the correct perspective of history. But to his contemporaries did not John send forth a brighter and a broader beam? Jesus, the Evangelists, Josephus, and the extra-canonical Christian tradition seem to answer: Yes.

CLAYTON RAYMOND BOWEN

MEADVILLE THEOLOGICAL SCHOOL
MEADVILLE, PA.

IS BELIEF IN THE HISTORICITY OF JESUS INDISPENSABLE TO CHRISTIAN FAITH?

In the October number of this *Journal* Professor Mathews offers some critical comments upon my article which appeared under the above caption in the July number. In offering a brief rejoinder may I be permitted to remind the reader of my hearty agreement with my critic in several important matters? Not only are we at one as to the necessity of affirming on historico-critical grounds the real historicity of Jesus, and as to the unique revelation-value of his person and work; no more is there any real issue between us as to the pedagogical value of having

Christian experience begin as a "religion of personal loyalty" to the historic Jesus, nor yet as to the fact that, speaking generally, Christianity with the historic Jesus is, temporarily at least, more pre-eminently "a gospel that breeds religious assurance" than Christianity without belief in the historicity of Jesus would be, for the reason that this belief gives such valuable "historical support to the validity of our confidence" in the fatherliness of God, immortality, and the worth of vicarious suffering. When Professor Mathews asks whether the "clearer revelation and deeper certainty" of the Christian religion are not "born of the conviction that God has actually expressed Himself in a definite individual of history," my reply is to be found in two sentences of the original article: "His historicity is *historically* indispensable" (i.e., in accounting for the "clearer revelation"), and, "The career of Jesus . . . gives us our best single empirical verification of . . . that religious faith which is essentially 'Christian'" (thus producing the "deeper certainty").

I seem to find an indication of further agreement in Professor Mathews' expressed "heartily assent to the apologetic value" of my argument, especially in view of the fact that the article in question was intended simply as an essay in apologetics. It did not undertake to discuss the historical question, but rather to fortify Christian religious faith against skeptical attacks while the historical question was being investigated. To this end it undertook to refute the dogmatic declaration that the discontinuance of belief in the historicity of Jesus must logically lead to the collapse of modern Christianity. A thoroughly Christian faith in God would still be logically possible, it was maintained, not only during the process of historical investigation, but even if the outcome of that investigation should be to render the historicity of Jesus either doubtful or untenable.

It is evident, then, that everything turns upon what is meant by "Christian faith," and this question Professor Mathews rightly singles out as the main point of dispute. I would be very far from claiming, of course, that "any genuine religious faith . . . is to be called Christian"; in my opinion neither Abraham nor Plato—to cite my critic's examples—possessed a faith that would measure up to the Christian standard; nor can we, I think, say anything very different for "modern liberal Judaism," except as an essentially Christian faith may have been mediated to particular individuals through the influence of Christianity.

Professor Mathews is mistaken, however, when he concludes that I use the term "faith" "in the theological sense," if he means by this that

I use it as the equivalent of theological belief. On the contrary I mean by faith the normal religious response to whatever content of experience has revelation-value; it is the act and attitude of trust or dependence with reference to a superhuman and transcendent, but revealed, Object. Religious faith makes use of theological ideas as instruments of adjustment in the religious situation, but the faith itself is to be as sharply distinguished from theological belief, almost, as from historical opinion.

And yet when we come to define *Christian* religious faith, the question arises as to the specific difference between Christian and other forms of religious faith. Is the differentia historical, or is it theological? As a matter of fact it may be stated in the historical form. Christian faith is trust in God as revealed in the spirit and purpose of the historic Jesus. But this reference to history is not the only possible way of defining the specific difference between Christian and other forms of religious faith. Christian faith is trust in the Christlike God; whether the Christ be regarded as historic fact or mere ideal, it is trust in the God of holy and unselfish love, whose purpose is the spiritual redemption of humanity, and who is revealed in the Christlike everywhere.

Now the point of importance is that while Christian faith *may* be defined in terms of specific history, it does not need to be so defined; it must, on the other hand, be defined in such a way as either states or implies a definite belief about God. If to maintain this is to use faith "in the theological sense," I plead guilty to the charge. What is really meant, however, is that while a particular historic fact may be necessary in many cases, not to the being but to the well-being of Christian faith, certain theological conceptions are essential, not only to the well-being but to the being of that faith. Liberal Protestantism regards the Jesus Christ of traditional Christian belief as in part a fiction. Recent critics have declared that the Jesus of liberal Protestantism is also a fiction. It is here maintained that even if it should become necessary to accept this negative view and regard both beliefs about Jesus as fictitious, one's Christian faith might still be kept intact. Naturally Christian faith in Jesus would be impossible, but unless we think of a second God with whom we have communion and upon whom we depend, no absolutely essential religious content would be lost. One could still trust in the same holy and loving God as before; and if, for the sake of reassurance, historical support should be demanded, it would still be possible to turn to the undisputed sections of the history of Christian experience, and also to present religious experience, which is history in the making. But on the other hand, although theology is not faith, some theology is

essential to it, and one could not regard the Christian God-idea as a fiction and logically continue to exercise a Christian religious faith.

The explanation of all this is that spiritual religion is self-dependent. She needs no instrument that she cannot provide. She requires no servant that she cannot command. Thus religion creates theology to be her servant. It is not otherwise with the employment of philosophical processes. However strenuously and justly philosophy may insist upon the recognition of the facts of science, her services can be accepted ever only as those of the handmaid of theology—not of a traditional system of theology, necessarily, but of whatever theology is ultimately necessary for the maintenance of spiritual religion. On the other hand, religion cannot make or remake the history of the past. Such an attempt, as if a Christian should declare that his religious experience settles for him the question of the historicity of Jesus, would be an unwarranted and intolerable dogmatism. If the Christian feels the need of a history other than that furnished by the most careful, critical methods, he must set about making new history; that is, he must make the history of the future, in so far as it depends upon himself, just what he would have it to be.

And this suggests a question of very great importance. May it not be that much of the weakness of present-day Christian faith is due to its having become too exclusively dependent upon the religious experience and inner assurance of another, even though that other be the Jesus of history? May it not perhaps once more have become expedient that the historical Jesus should go away, as it were, for a time? And if he go away, then will the Inner Companion come, for then will religious faith be driven back upon the revelation of God within. And doubtless the historical Jesus will come again, and that with greater power than ever, as a result of having successfully endured the crucial tests of critical investigation. At any rate the Christian community has power to surrender its religious values to the most thorough historical criticism, and it has power to take them again.

I am unable therefore to see any logical reason why the content of belief in "the fatherliness of God, immortality, and the worth of vicarious suffering would certainly be modified," so that "without the historical Jesus they could not be much in advance of the beliefs of modern liberal Judaism or even of Platonism." This result would not necessarily follow unless the absence of Jesus from history would disprove these Christian ideas, or at least disprove all that elevates Christianity above liberal Judaism and Platonism. But that would be impossible, of course;

the absence of Jesus from history before his birth did not *disprove* what we have come to believe as a result of his life and work.

But Professor Mathews touches upon an important matter when he says: "If his character and resurrection are definite facts, then we certainly have more knowledge of the real nature of the spiritual life than would otherwise be ours." This I take to be a reference to the argument that if we know Jesus to have been an historical person of the ideal character ascribed to him, and if we know that he rose triumphant over death, we have an important empirical basis of inference as to the relation of a triumphant immortality to spirituality of character. Very true; but just how are we critically minded people of a scientific age to *know* that this admittedly historical person of ideal character really did rise triumphant over death, and that he is alive forevermore? What is our main basis of assurance? Not the story of the empty grave, and not even the record of the appearances to the disciples, for we cannot quite disprove in either case the proffered alternative explanation. Our assurance lies in the fact that such a conviction is necessarily involved in our trust in the Christlikeness of the ultimate Power in the universe. If we could prove the historicity of the life and disprove the reality of the triumph over death, we should have good reason for doubting either the Christlikeness or the sufficient power of God. On the other hand, granted the essential historicity of the life, and trusting in the holy and loving fatherliness of the Supreme Power in the universe, we are assured of the undiminished conservation of that highest single value of human history, the personality of the historic Jesus. It is reassuring to remember that Jesus, through his trust in the Father, was confident that he would triumph over death; but at most this simply affects the degree of our certainty; it does not add new content to our faith. Our Christian trust in God is thus the surest basis of belief in the immortality of Jesus, and for this reason *the content of that faith cannot be modified by what can be proved only by means of that content.*

One question more. Granted the historicity of Jesus, was not *his* faith fully Christian? And yet *he* could not make that faith rest upon the historicity of a person of ideal character who had gone before him. If then we believe in the historicity of Jesus, we must admit that Christian faith has been possible in the case of one at least who did not believe in the historicity of any ideal Jesus before his day.